The Big Cut

By

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White credits appear on the blank screen. As these credits appear we hear a PHONE RINGING. After a few rings we hear someone push the speakerphone button.

FADE IN.

INT. OFFICE

A typical film director’s office. Film posters cover the walls of the room. In the back of the room is a small collection of alcoholic beverages. The furniture seems cheap, as if to imply this director has not made it yet... which he hasn’t. There is a desk with the ringing phone on it. There is also a couch in the room. BARTON, the film’s director, has just made his first major film. On the other end of the phone is one of the studio executives (his name is David). All through this phone call, and during the entire film, we never leave the office.

BARTON
Hello?

DAVID
Barton?

BARTON
Yes.

DAVID
It’s David.

BARTON
Hello, David.

DAVID
We got the results back.

BARTON
And?

DAVID
They loved the movie. They think it’s a masterpiece.

BARTON
But?

DAVID
The shootout at the end. They feel it was too violent.

(CONTINUED)
BARTON
Too violent?

DAVID
Yes. They believe the last few moments of the film could be less violent.

BARTON
But it’s the ending of the film.

DAVID
I know that.

BARTON
So what’s the problem?

DAVID
They’ve given the film an X rating.

BARTON
An X rating?

DAVID
Well, an NC-17. They feel the amount of blood used is too much.

BARTON
It’s a realistic amount. I made sure of that.

DAVID
I’m sure it is. But they don’t feel that way.

BARTON
I don’t care how they feel. It’s my film.

DAVID
I know it’s your film. But it’s everyone involved in it’s film also.

BARTON
And they all feel the same way.

DAVID
Barton, listen to me, If you release this film with an NC-17 rating you will be finished before you even start.
CONTINUED:

BARTON
I’m not changing the ending. I’m not cutting one frame from this film.

DAVID
It won’t make any money.

BARTON
It’s not about money! I didn’t make this film for money! This is my film. I made it for me. The film is my masterpiece.

DAVID
Listen to me-

BARTON
No! You listen to me. Not one frame of that film gets cut. Not one second goes through re-shoots.

DAVID
Listen to me, Barton. You don’t have final cut. I’m giving you this warning because I like you. I think you’ve got great talent. But if you don’t make the changes I’ll cut the film myself.

BARTON
But I can’t change it. I won’t. And you won’t either.

DAVID
What about the producers who took a risk with letting you direct this film? Sure we all loved your script, but being a good writer doesn’t make you a good director. Listen, Bart, For every Tarentino there’s a hundred other guys who fail miserably. We can’t afford that here. Our producers can’t afford that. You can’t afford that.

(pause)
You have until tomorrow to make the changes. If I don’t hear back from you I’ll change it myself.

David hangs up. The sound of the RING TONE buzzes through the room. It goes until the beeping sound starts, that’s when Barton turns it off. Barton stares blankly at the
phone. He makes his way over to the alcoholic beverages and pours himself a glass. He takes a drink and winces at its effect. He pours himself another drink. He grabs the bottle and his glass and makes his way to the couch. He drinks what’s in his glass and pours himself another. Just then, the PHONE RINGS. Barton looks over to his desk. He lets it ring a few times before getting up and walking to the desk. He sits down in the desk chair and presses the speaker phone button. On the other end of the phone is Julia, Barton’s love interest.

**BARTON**
Hello?

**JULIA**
Bart? What’s wrong.

**BARTON**
Julia. They want to change my film.

**JULIA**
What do you mean? Filming already wrapped.

**BARTON**
They want me to make cuts.

**JULIA**
Who does?

**BARTON**
The studio. They showed the film to the MPAA and they gave it an NC-17. They feel the film won’t make any money with an NC-17 rating.

**JULIA**
Who cares how they feel? It’s your film.

**BARTON**
They have final cut.

**JULIA**
What does that mean?

**BARTON**
They get to decide what the final version of the movie looks like.

**JULIA**
I thought that was your job?

(CONTINUED)
BARTON
It’s not part of my contract. They have a legal right to it.

JULIA
What are you gonna do?

BARTON
I don’t know. I have until tomorrow to make the changes.

JULIA
What do they want changed?

BARTON
The ending. They feel it’s too violent.

JULIA
Is it?

BARTON
It’s the perfect ending for the movie. Our main character realizes he’s between a rock and a hard place. He realizes there’s nothing he can do. So he decides to shoot his way out. And when he can’t take it anymore... he puts the gun to himself. The film ends with his brains splattered on the wall.

JULIA
That sounds a little extreme, Bart.

BARTON
Extreme? It’s my ending. I can’t change it. I can’t ruin my masterpiece.

JULIA
Do you really think altering the ending will change the entire movie?

BARTON
The film is perfect as is.

Barton pours himself a drink and downs it.

JULIA
Bart, Are you drinking?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

BARTON
Yes.

JULIA
You shouldn’t be. You know what the doctor said... about last time.

BARTON
I don’t care about the doctor. I’m drinking, and I’m going to enjoy it.

He pours another drink and, again, downs it.

JULIA
I’m really worries about you, Barton.

BARTON
I’m worried myself.

JULIA
What does that mean?

BARTON
I’m afraid I’ll do something if they change my movie.

Barton looks at a poster of the 1924 film Greed on his wall.

JULIA
What are you talking about.

BARTON
In 1924, Erich von Stroheim completed the film Greed for MGM. It ran about nine hours long. After being screened once He was forced to cut the movie to a reasonable length. He reluctantly cut the movie to about four hours. Irving Thalberg, who was head of MGM, took the film over and, against the director’s protests, edited the film down to two hours. The deleted footage was then destroyed.

JULIA
What happened?

BARTON
The film went on to be a box office disaster. What was once a

(MORE)
BARTON (cont’d)
masterpiece of cinema was reduced
to garbage. The next time Erich von
Stroheim saw Irving Thalberg he
almost murdered him by beating him
so badly.

JULIA
Barton?

Barton pours himself a drink and downs it.

BARTON
If they touch my film...

Barton opens a drawer in his desk. A gun is inside it. He
takes it out and sets it down on the desk.

BARTON
I don’t know if I could act
rationally.

JULIA
That was years ago, Barton. They
didn’t know any better. People make
mistakes. And you have to live with
those mistakes. I know you love
this film, trust me I do. But after
this one you can make another one
just the way you want it. There
will be others, Barton.

BARTON
There are no others, Julia. This is
the only one. This is my film. If
they change it...

Barton grips the gun.

JULIA
Barton. This is the business. It’s
about making money. Producers are
not concerned about the artistic
quality. They just want to make
money. It’s not right. It’s not
fair. It’s show business.

BARTON
They won’t change my movie.

(Continued)
CONTINUED: 8.

JULIA
Do you think you’re the only one who’s had this happen to them?

Barton looks at a poster of the 1984 film Once Upon A Time In America.

BARTON
In 1984, Sergio Leone made Once Upon A Time In America. The studio had it shortened from four to two hours. Destroying Leone’s vision. That film went on to fail miserably.

JULIA
What did he do?

BARTON
Leone had died before he ever saw the completed film... He died knowing his own version of the film.

JULIA
Barton...

Barton pours a drink... and downs it.

BARTON
Ignorance is bliss.

Barton puts the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. His brains splattering against the wall. Julia screams at the other end of the phone. Her end hangs up. We hear the RING TONE and the eventual BEEPING sound it makes after. Over these sounds roll the end credits.

THE END.